

BLOSSOMING HOPE



A SILVER
LINING SERIES
BOOK - 5



LANE ANDERSON

Blossoming Hope

**A Silver Lining Series
Book 5**

Lane Anderson



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A Special Gift For You!

I wanted to give you a special gift just for joining me in this adventure to the past. Having you by my side is an essential component in this journey of conquering all my dreams as an author. I don't take you for granted, and I greatly appreciate your presence! So to say thank you, I am gifting you a Free Copy of "**Bound to be my Sweetheart!**" Get your free copy by clicking the image below or [clicking here!](#)



Kind Regards,
[Lane Anderson](#)

Contents

Title Page

Copyright

A Special Gift For You!

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

Chapter Four

Chapter Five

Epilogue

P.S. Readers

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Other Books by Lane Anderson

Chapter One

Columbus, Ohio
1918



Hope stood with her arms over her chest. 'What a way to appear like a bride, Hope,' she thought to herself. She sniffed a couple of times, trying to control the tears that washed down her face, but to no avail.

Unknown to her, Cynthia and Alma had caught up with Maria before she could leave and she could hear Maria begging.

She walked with her back facing Hope but Hope could not look at her. Suddenly Hope rose and turned on her heels and ran back into the house through one of the back doors.

"Hope!" Alma called out to her. She tried to catch up with her but Hope was too fast.

"We're getting another dress!" Cynthia added but Hope did not stop. Alma sighed.

"This is just awful, Maria. How could you?" Alma said to a sobbing Maria.

Hope sat facing the window of her room. There was another knock on the door, a much gentler one than Cynthia's previous knock. She didn't move. She did not want to see or talk to anyone.

The person at the door was persistent. When she didn't move, the person knocked two more times.

"Child, it's me. Your mother," Rosemary spoke.

Hope hesitated for a while before standing to unlock the door.

"Can I come in?" Rosemary asked as Hope opened the door.

"Yes," Hope nodded and wiped her face. She was trying to stop the tears that threatened to pour out but to no avail. They came rushing down and Rosemary pulled her into her arms.

"I know what's going through your mind now," Rosemary said. "I know you're rethinking pushing through with the wedding," Rosemary brushed through Hope's hair with her fingers. "I heard what Anna sent Maria to do and I'm so sorry, my dear," Rosemary said.

Hope sniffed, "It was Anna?" She asked.

Rosemary nodded, "That should not have happened to you or anyone at all for that matter."

"I know I do," Hope said in-between sobs. "But Anna and Diane won't rest as long as I'm happy," she said.

Rosemary laughed. "I've met their kind, Hope. Trust me. Alma and

Cynthia thought of getting you a new dress but by my good judgment, I suggested I give you mine instead. The very same dress I wore for my wedding," Rosemary said, her voice cracking, trying to hold back tears. "What do you think?"

Hope nodded. She always loved the pictures she saw. She remembered a couple of times when she sat with her parents and they told her every detail of their wedding.

It was a small wedding; she remembered her father telling her. They had to get married in a small church because of the secrecy of their marriage.

They knew their union would not be accepted since they met while serving at their master's mansion. Time told on them all the same and a few years after their wedding; they brought forth beautiful Hope.

"Do you know how I got this dress?" Her mother asked, pointing to the dress hanging on the dresser in front of them.

"I believe I have heard that story a thousand times already, Mother," Hope said, lightly tapping her mother's arm.

"It wouldn't hurt to hear once more how your father spent half of the day before the wedding, in the company of his dear mother, looking for a dress for me," she reminisced.

"You know, I planned on wearing the old court dress I wore on the day we had to legalize the wedding," she paused and inhaled, "but your father took me by surprise as always. He even said that he'd love to see it on you too. You should wear this dress in his memory." Rosemary suggested with tears in her eyes.

"I'd love that," Hope laughed. "Will it be a good fit?" She asked.

"I hear that Cynthia can fix anything," Rosemary said.

Hopefully, it wasn't too late.

The white petals on the floor were a sign of peace. The type of peace that could calm even the wildest storm: a peace that could unite a father to his children, a peaceful life Hope had led until this moment.

Hope was a light that illuminated every nook and cranny she entered. Hope was the light that made Eric understand that it is possible to love again amidst all trials. Hope was the confirmation that Eric could still have the type of love that could overcome storms.

Hope was the confirmation that Rosemary would regain good health. She was the last string of a happy life Rosemary held on to. Hope was the evidence that Charles, who everyone assumed was a shy man, was indeed outgoing and intellectual with many ideas about life.

Hope was proof that people like Diane have nothing on "peasants." Hope was proof that Anna could be wealthy and influential but still not measure up to the moral standards of some low-class people.

As she walked down the aisle in her elegant dress, she did not think of the arrogant man with beautiful green eyes who spoke rudely to her. Neither did she think of the man who insisted she referred to him as 'Mr. Burnett' when she started working as his children's nanny.

Her heart was filled with joy and gladness as she remembered that man who took her hands and placed them on the keys of the grand piano sitting pretty on the ground floor of his mansion. She smiled as she remembered the man she often encountered in the garden she headed for right now.

Contrary to what her mother thought, the dress was a perfect fit, and she loved every second she spent in it.

In front of their favorite spot, Eric stood there, patiently waiting for her as she walked down the aisle. With a bouquet of freshly picked lilies—which was a replacement for her flowers, Maria shredded into pieces as well—she walked down, nothing less than twenty rows of chairs, where people she never imagined she would see in her life sat.

Alice and Morgan walked in front of her, looking as cute as ever. Funny right? The little groom usually walks with the groom himself, but this one couldn't risk it. He wanted to be close to her to make sure she didn't runoff. This was her family.

When she got to the front of the garden, she turned and gave her bouquet to Celine, who smiled giddily. She had to be the happiest person alive.

"You look beautiful," she whispered.

Hope turned and walked to where Eric stood with the priest. "I do," she exclaimed.

Everyone laughed. "He hasn't asked you anything yet," Eric leaned in to whisper. He looked closely at the most beautiful woman he had ever known.

"I know," she stated as she looked around. She saw a few faces she knew and her mother, who put their thumbs up. "This is me saying I do. I am yours," she stated and turned back to look at him.

The congregation gave an emotional aw as Eric smiled and went in for a kiss. She was his Hope.

The priest, obviously not comfortable with the rearrangement of the ceremony, cleared his throat. "Can we get on with the rest of the formalities?"

"Yes!" the audience echoed.

"Now do you, Eric, take Miss Hope Duncan to be your lawful wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward? If you will, say, I do," the priest said.

"I do!" Eric thundered; the congregation clapped. Seeing people in love was magical.

"The same goes to you, Miss Hope. Do you take Mr. Eric Burnett to

be your lawful wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward? If you will, say, I do."

"I do," Hope replied as people cheered in the crowd. "By the power vested in me, I now pronounce you both man and wife," the priest proclaimed. The uproar increased once again, "You may now kiss the bride again," he said and closed the booklet in his hands.

"I love you, Eric Burnett," Hope said.

"I love you too, Hope Burnett," Eric responded and kissed her gently.

The congregation erupted in loud applause. It turned out the people who were in support of their union were more than they thought. Thinking about that alone, Hope was sure that a solid future with Eric was secured.

The astounding music that came from the orchestra was something Hope believed she would never stop loving. Eternal love was the term she would most likely give to it.

Morgan sat at the piano. His fingers gracefully touching over each key. The soft sound the piano produced blended perfectly with the tenor trombone, which Hope could easily pick out.

The man holding the instrument, which had a cylindrical bore, a sliding tube, and a piston valve, stood gracefully with his cheeks blown out. It was a rare one, she could tell. It had been her favorite instrument after the piano. Her heart warmed at the realization that Eric had remembered that.

"So milady, may I have this dance?" Eric came up behind her. She turned to face him and met his hand held out for her to take.

"On the account that I am your only bride, then you may have this dance," Hope replied playfully.

Eric pretended to look around as if searching for another bride. His shoulders sunk, and he shrugged. He looked around once more, this time making sure he saw all the corners of the carefully decorated ballroom. The search ended when his eyes landed on Rosemary. His eyes lit up with mischief as though he had some plan cooked up.

"I have searched through the room, milady, and I am certain that I indeed have another bride. I'm sorry, milady if this does upset you, but I would love to go dance with my other bride," he said and bowed.

Hope followed his line of sight to where Rosemary stood. She looked beautiful, and there was not one ounce of doubt that Hope got her beautiful looks from her.

She slapped him playfully on his arm and glared at him warningly. "My mother? Is my mother your other bride? She is far too old for a young man like yourself."

Eric pretended to grimace and said, "Too old? I think not. You do

not get to talk about my other bride that way."

Hope laughed the hearty laughter that Eric loved to hear from her. "I accept defeat, milord. But at this point, I would rather you dismiss any other bride you have and have that dance with the one standing right before you," she requested.

Eric turned his head to fix his gaze on her, "That could work out well too," he said. "But before then, my other bride did say she would love a little chat with you. Perhaps, you should oblige her request beforehand?"

"Of course," Hope laughed and walked over to where her mother stood. Eric walked closely behind her.

"Hello, Mother," she greeted.

"My dear child," Rosemary responded without turning to look at her.

"Yes, Mother," Hope replied.

Rosemary looked through the crowd as though she was looking for someone. She turned until she came to face Hope and Eric. "This day is going to be remembered for the rest of your lives," she said in a breath.

"Mother, is there something wrong?" Hope asked worriedly. The tone of her mother's voice scared her a great deal.

"No, not at all, child," Rosemary said. "I'm just glad I lived to see this day, and it is all thanks to you both." She smiled. "Mind if I make a toast?" She asked.

"Not at all, Mother. The floor is yours," Eric said.

He picked up a glass and began to clink on it with the side of a spoon. In a matter of seconds, everyone's attention was on him.

"Before I say anything else, I would love to introduce to everyone the woman who birthed my beautiful wife and also, who through her previous health challenges brought us together. Rosemary Duncan!"

There was loud applause in the hall, and Rosemary stepped forward, with Hope trailing behind her. She had changed from the gown she wore earlier to the burgundy dinner dress she had gotten at the store with Alma.

Rosemary cleared her throat; everyone went silent. "I do not have much to say. I just want my daughter to know how happy I am for her. She has taken care of me for years since I fell sick. She has made sacrifices a young girl should never have to make. Since she met Eric, both of our lives changed for the better. I can't thank you enough. The both of you. Cheers to the bride and groom. Cheers to a happy married life," she said and raised her glass.

People around raised their glasses and toasted to Eric and Hope's marriage as well.

"Cheers to a happy married life." the crowd chanted.

Chapter Two



Eric woke up excited the following morning. Due to the wedding, he was granted a week's leave at the bank. He was going to use that time he had very wisely.

The plans for Hope's restaurant had been finalized, and all that was left to commence on the project was Hope's final stamp of approval. Throughout the planning, Eric had not informed Hope about his plans to begin the project. He mentioned it from time to time, asking probing questions about what she would love to see in her restaurant. What colors she'd like? Which direction she'd want the hostess stand? Round or square plates?

With the input Hope gave regularly, Eric built her dream restaurant with the help of a highly skilled architect. Eric had to admit; the whole planning process was an interesting one. Now, all that was left to proceed was Hope's approval. He had grand plans to seek for that in the garden tonight.

Even after they were married, they still took regular evening walks in the garden. It was where their love had sprouted and where it would continue to grow.

Although Eric had planned to spring one or two surprises on Hope during the day, things didn't turn out exactly that way since he had to spend the day at the office concluding things before his replacement took over.

"I hope the kids didn't give you any trouble," he said.

Hope shrugged, "They are children, Eric. It is only expected of them," she replied. Of the truth, Morgan had been a lot to handle that day. He had lost a tooth and had a hard time dealing with the pain. Hope couldn't blame him, so she just comforted him the best she knew how.

"Morgan lost his first tooth," she told him.

"Wow," was all Eric said. He was a little jealous that he hadn't been there to witness his son lose his first tooth. "I guess he didn't react too well to that?"

Hope sighed, "Then you guessed right," she said as she leaned into him.

"I'm sorry," Eric said. "In other news, I've had this on my mind for a long time now, and I didn't know how to break it to you," he paused and exhaled. "I know it's something you would indeed love," he said.

"Not another expensive gift," Hope whined. Since their wedding, Eric had done nothing but spoil her. He bought her expensive dresses

and jewelry she was sure cost more than the whole of her mother's hospital bill.

Initially, she refused to take them on account that they cost too much, but he gave her the same speech Alma had given her. She deserved everything she was getting. Hope deserved it. She was not used to being treated well by so many people, so it was hard for her to get used to it.

"Well," Eric started, "I'd love to see it more like an investment," he marveled.

"And what could it be?" Hope asked. She was curious to know what Eric had up his sleeve.

"Your restaurant," he shouted.

Hope almost missed her step but immediately regained composure and turned to look at him, "My restaurant?" She asked, believing she had not heard him correctly.

"Yes, Hope," he said. "How does that sound?"

Hope inhaled, "It has been my dream to get a place of my own, that you very well. Although I would have wanted to build it on my own, the resources were never available," she said.

"I'm not asking you to put anything into this," he said. "All I'm requesting is your consent to go ahead with the plans I have already put in place."

"You mean to tell me that you have already had everything planned out?" Hope asked disbelievingly. It was hard to wrap her head around what Eric was saying.

She thought for a while and said, "That was why the questions kept springing up," she shook her head. "I can't believe this, Eric," she said as a tear dropped from her eye. "I can't believe you are doing this, just for me. I'm so happy to have you, Eric. And this is not because of the things you give. You're a good man, and I love you because of that."

Eric gazed at Hope, moving his eyes from her swollen eyes up to her red cheeks and up to her hair, which she had left to grow a few inches longer. She was perfect. So perfect, and he was lucky to have her as his own.

"There is nothing I wouldn't do to see you happy, my dear wife," he declared. "Now does that mean I have your approval to move forward with the plans for the restaurant?" He requested.

She laughed as she wiped her eyes, "I don't think I've had a chance to have a peek at these plans yet. Even so, I know they are according to my liking since you've been asking me questions from sun up to sundown, you sneaky buzzard. So yes, I'd love to build this restaurant with you," she stated delightedly.

Eric smiled. He was happy she did not reject the offer, "How soon do you think the building plans should commence?" He questioned.

"I don't know," Hope replied, "Let's start right away!"

Eric and Hope would never be able to tell their love story without mentioning one very significant name, Alma. She was the reason everything had gone well until this very moment. Hope couldn't believe she was leaving them.

"And you remember when my mother tried to tell you off?" Alma asked laughing. Contrary to the emotion she expressed, she did not find any of those things funny. Eric was a grown man and Diane had to understand that he could make decisions without her approval. Not everything he did had to be pleasing to her.

"It feels like it was just yesterday," Hope joined in. It was clear she hadn't forgotten about that day, not one bit. It was in the hospital when Diane was undergoing "heart treatment." Eric denied her the opportunity of speaking with his children on the basis that he doesn't want the children to be around someone so toxic. "It doesn't even matter now," she said, "we are happy and that's all that matters."

"By the way, how are you feeling?" She asked Alma.

"Honestly, I can't tell," Alma said dismissively.

Hope placed a hand over hers as she came to the bed to fold a skirt, "You can talk to me Alma, about anything," she said.

Alma sighed and sat on the bed. She smiled as if she remembered something, "For one, I'm proud of myself. I mean I won't attribute your union today to my hard work, but I'm happy I gave Eric the little pushes he needed and he didn't hesitate," she said proudly.

Hope looked at her expecting more, knowing there was more. "And?" She prodded further.

Alma sighed, "And I wish I could invite Mother to my wedding. Introduce her to Tony's family and all. But you know my mother, that is impossible," she relaxed more into the bed and continued, "She might not give Tony's family the accorded respect because they are not a high standing family in society. It is why I prefer to keep the wedding away from her. I have informed every other person about it," she said.

"That's okay," Hope said rubbing the back of her palm. "So long as you are happy, I am too," she told her.

Alma began to weep as she enveloped her in a hug. She was grateful for every second she spent with Hope and she was going to miss her.

Before any of them could continue talking, there was a knock on the door. Alma hurriedly wiped the tears from her face before asking the person to come in. It was Joanne.

"My child," she said walking up to Alma. "Is there something wrong?"

Alma had been wrong in thinking that Joanne would not have noticed that she had been crying. In just seconds, she was sitting beside her. "A fine gentleman is here to see you," Joanne informed her.

Hope stood immediately and put her arms over Alma's shoulders. "He's here," she said. "Are you prepared to go down to greet him?"

Alma shook her head. "I still have to put these clothes in order. I knew I should have done that yesterday but with so many activities, there was no way I could have," she answered.

"And that's why I am here," Joanne uttered. "I'll help you pack the rest of your belongings. You go down and meet your gentleman," she said laughing, "And I have to say, he is a fine one," Joanne winked at her.

Alma shook her head again. "It will be unfair for me to leave all this for you," she expressed. "They are my responsibility after all."

"That's nonsense, child. Go down and meet the gentleman. Hope dear, take her down. Don't keep him waiting any longer," she insisted, and with that Alma and Hope left the room.

Tony was a tall man, a lot taller than Eric. Dressed modestly, his appearance did not show wealth in any way but his stature commanded attention.

"Alma," he breathed out as he saw her walk down the stairs. There was no doubt he was in love with her. He looked at her as if she was the only woman in the room.

"Hello, Tony," Alma replied.

When she reached the last step, he approached her and wrapped his arms around her, "It's been too long since I've seen you. I've missed you terribly," he said, inhaling the scent of her perfume.

"I did ask you to come home with me," Alma replied. "That's in the past now. Are you ready to meet my family?"

When Eric brought up the idea of visiting his mother, Hope was not thrilled about it. Not that she showed it because that would be out of her character. Even after they had gotten married she still had concerns when it came to Diane.

The drive to the hospital was quiet. She did not have much to say, and neither did Eric. But he constantly rubbed his hand over hers to signal, 'Everything is going to be alright.'

When they arrived at the hospital, Maria was just leaving Diane's room. Eric acknowledged her with nothing more than a nod. It was unusual to see Eric give someone that kind of treatment, but considering everything that happened, his demeanor was justified.

"Hello Mother," he said as she walked into the room. Holding Hope's hand in his. Her hands began to shiver and he immediately

placed their hands on the bed frame, making it easy for him to put his other hand over them.

Diane turned in her bed so she could face them, "Hello, son" she said. "Hope," she nodded.

"I know you're already aware that the wedding commenced despite the dress situation and all," Eric said. "This is the first time I am bringing Hope here as my wife. I just want to let you know that things need to change. Hope is my wife now and I want you to treat her with respect," Eric commanded.

Hope bowed her head. She did not want to be the reason Eric had more issues with his mother.

"Congratulations," Diane replied, shocking them both. Eric knew she would have to accept her fate but he never thought it would be so soon.

"Congratulations?" Another voice asked. It was Anna. She scoffed, "I pray you both get what you deserve. I'm leaving this city for good," she turned and left the room.

Eric and Hope turned to look at Diane, looking for a reaction from her, but she just shrugged.

"You're not going to stop her?" Eric probed as he walked closer to Diane's bedside.

"No, it is time for her to leave. She has overstayed. Because of you, she has no reason to remain here. Eric, what did you expect?"

Eric shook his head, "She has been enough trouble for me. I suppose it is best if she leaves."

"But," Diane started.

"No buts Mother. What done is done," Eric pointed out. "If you do not mind Mother, we'll take our leave as well. Do take care, Mother" he said and walked out with Hope's hand in his.

Chapter Three



Four months had passed since Anna left for good and things in the Burnett mansion had returned to normal. Eric returned to his job while supervising Hope's restaurant. It was what gave him the most joy, to see Hope's dream being brought to life.

Hope did not pass on any opportunity to visit the site. In opposition to what Eric told her, it wasn't a new building that they were starting from scratch. Rather, it was a former charity home that was being renovated. After Hope saw the place, she opted out of a full renovation.

The building held memories of too many children. She wanted to embrace them, not bury them.

On one hand, some of the contractors thought she was gradually going insane. But the main contractor, Mr. Denise could see the beauty in everything she suggested. Sometimes, Hope felt he was patronizing her because he was Eric's friend, but other times, when he explained vividly and plunged into her plans; she really felt he understood her.

One would think that Hope visited the site every day because she wanted to. However, that was not the case. Diane was back at the mansion and although she wished they could get along, she didn't want to give her an opportunity to wreak havoc. So she chose to stay out of the house as much as possible.

This particular day, Rosemary requested that Hope remained home just to see how things go. Even though she was not comfortable with the idea, she could not imagine refusing a request from her mother.

After her last visit to the doctor, they were told that there was no trace of pneumonia in her blood. Initially, Rosemary could not believe it, but after many visits to her doctor, it was confirmed that indeed she was well. She could hardly contain her excitement.

Hope was overwhelmed with joy each time she saw her mother get around by herself without anyone assisting her. When she offered to help her set up the restaurant that was the height of her joy. Sometimes when they had happy moments like that, she could not help but imagine how it would have been if her father were there with them. Either way, she was grateful because like he always said, 'Everything good will come.'

True to what he said, that was the joy Rosemary and Hope were experiencing. Many good things had come indeed.

"What will you do to keep busy today?" Rosemary asked Hope.

"Certainly not helping Diane, Mother," Hope barked. They were in the guest room, putting together family pictures that Diane would not dare allow the staff to touch.

"I'm very sure she doesn't want me here. Or you for that matter." Hope lectured as she dropped the frame she held in her hands. She held a black and white photograph of a teenage Eric. He had just begun growing facial hair at such a young age.

"Early bloomer," she scoffed. Rosemary came beside her to see what had caught her interest. "It's nothing really, just a picture of Eric."

"Let me see that," Rosemary laughed.

At the same time, a loud throaty cough came from the next room. It could only be one person, Diane.

Rosemary sighed and turned to look at Hope. She stood panicking. She proceeded to go to the room to find out what was going on but Rosemary held her back. The cough lingered on and on. Soon it began to sound like she was choking.

"Let her be," Rosemary voiced.

"But why?" Hope protested.

"Because you are only going to get chased out of there. It happens every day," she explained.

Diane sounded awful. She could not be pretending this well. The last time she heard someone cough like that was when Rosemary was ill before she started receiving treatment.

"Does Eric know about this?" Hope questioned.

"I've hinted it to him a few times, but Diane keeps insisting that she is well and her immune system is a lot stronger than mine," Rosemary informed her.

"She had to turn this into a conflict of classes?" Hope asked. "That woman is so hard to care for, why must she be this way?"

"You can't blame her, child. We didn't grow up in the same way as they did," Rosemary said, defending Diane's behaviors.

"That's beside the point, Mother. You think I should talk to Eric?"

"Certainly," Rosemary replied.

It took longer than usual for Eric to get home and that worried Hope. She began to imagine all the worst possible things that could have happened to him on his way home. She was concerned if they would find his car turned over without a sign of him in sight, just like her father.

Suddenly, the front door screeched and Eric entered.

"Oh Eric, I've been so worried," Hope said immediately he walked through the door. Without leaving room for him to take off his coat, Hope lunged towards him and wrapped her arms around him.

"I'm sorry I scared you, my love," Eric professed apologetically. He sniffed her hair like he did every time he held her close. "During my time away after the wedding, the man who was sent to be my replacement for that week made a lot of mistakes and I had to make up for all of those mishaps before I returned home tonight," he explained.

"Oh, I understand," Hope replied, letting go of him and smoothening his coat.

"Is there something you need?" Eric asked, sensing the urgency in her eyes. Something was disturbing her, he could tell. "Is there something wrong? Did my mother do anything? Is it the building?" Eric asked in a rush, trying to understand the reason behind her sorrow.

"It's your mother, Eric," she said. "But don't go thinking she did anything bad. She didn't," she hurriedly added before he started to formulate any outlandish ideas.

"Then what could the matter be?" Eric queried.

"Her health, Eric. I'm worried about her health. I've been out of the house for so long I did not notice. Today, I stayed home. I saw for myself. I heard her dreadful cough, Diane is not well."

Eric shook his head. The last thing he wanted Hope to worry about was Diane's health. Eric was aware she was gradually growing ill and had confronted her many times about it. She argued that she was very fine. "...and that is why Alma will be here tomorrow." He finished off. "I'm sorry I didn't tell you earlier. I just didn't want to bother you with matters that concern, my mother."

Hope shook her head, "Please don't keep things from me, Eric. I want to know always," she voiced and pecked him on his lips. "Let's get you to bed now."

"And how do you think I'm going to do that?" Alma asked. "You know amongst the both of us, she hates me the most," Alma pointed out.

Eric shook his head profusely, "That's not true, Alma. Mother doesn't hate you. She just doesn't support your choices, that's all."

"Neither does she support yours, but she still shows you that she loves you. You can't say the same about me," Alma replied.

"That doesn't change the fact that she needs your help, Alma," Rosemary uttered. "If she doesn't receive proper help soon, I'm sure it will be too late for her. She's far from pretending, she needs help. You have a chance to save her, just do it."

"Okay," Alma muttered. "I'll need your assistance, Rosemary," she added.

"That won't be a problem," Rosemary assured her.

"I am not sick!" Diane yelled and immediately slumped over the bed into a fit of deep throaty coughs.

"It could be a common cold, Diane," Rosemary said. "Look at it this way; you are most definitely not sick, my dear. You did say your immune system is a lot stronger than mine. I agree with you; we just want to get rid of that horrible cough you have, dear."

"And how long is that going to take?" Diane challenged.

"Just a few minutes, Mother," Alma replied.

"If it makes you feel any better, everyone here is going to the hospital as well. Not to accompany you, but for annual checkups." Rosemary declared.

"Both of you? Eric too?" Diane asked with interest.

"Yes," Alma and Rosemary answered in unison.

Upon hearing the way Diane responded, fear gripped Rosemary. She could tell by the tone of her voice that it was not going to be long before they lost her. She had seen a lot of people in Diane's state during her stay at both hospitals. But she would not say that to anyone.

The drive to the hospital was a quiet one. Eric was amazed by how easy it was for Alma and Rosemary to convince Diane to take the required tests. One thing was certain, the fears in his head aligned with Rosemary's. He feared also that it was only a matter of time before they lost her.

Because of the number of people visiting the hospital, they had to use two vehicles since one would not do.

"What a pleasant surprise to see you, senior Mrs. Burnett. How have you been?" The doctor asked as they walked into the reception. He was informed beforehand of Diane's symptoms and denial of her illness. He prepared the necessary items for her tests before they arrived. To fulfill their end of the bargain, everybody ran their routine checkups as well.

After the tests, they all sat in the doctor's office, waiting for their results. Since he was a friend of Eric's, he was able to pull some strings to ensure that the test results came out the same day.

"Hello," the doctor greeted everyone as he walked back into his office. He held a long brown sealed envelope in his hands. "Eric, do you mind if I speak to you alone for a minute or two?"

"Is that concerning my health?" Diane asked.

"Yes and no, Mrs. Burnett." Eric's doctor's replied. "One is about you than the other is about, the young Mrs. Burnett."

"Oh," Diane said. "Every well." "The young Mrs. Burnett," she mumbled under breathe in disdain.

He turned to Eric and lifted a brow. "Is that okay with you?" He

asked.

"Just the news about my mother. We can speak here in her presence. The rest will wait till Hope returns. I'm very sure she would want to know what you have to say to her before anyone else does," Eric replied.

"As you please," the doctor remarked. "Now, Mrs. Diane you are in critical condition which requires immediate medical attention. Sadly, your blood pressure is too high and from what I can see here, you have severe hypertension. That is the cause of your prolonged coughs."

"That can't be possible," Diane said in a low tone.

Eric sighed and Alma buried her face in her palms. "If only you worried less about frivolous things and more about your health, Mother," she muttered beneath her breath.

"I'm sorry to say it this way but, if it's not handled immediately, it could lead to a stroke. A full stroke. If you don't mind, I have to attend to another patient. You can call my attention when the young Mrs. Burnett returns. Help yourself to anything in my cupboard there." He mentioned and walked out of the room.

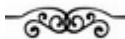
"Now are you ready to begin treatment?" Eric turned to Diane.

"Do you want to get rid of me so soon?" Diane asked.

Eric shook his head, "Not at all, Mother. I just want you to get well."

"Very well, let's begin with my treatment."

Chapter Four



Eric, Rosemary, Diane, and Alma sat talking in the doctor's office. They had sent the children away with Linda and Charles since they needed to free the hospital of noisy children.

Conversing loudly and laughing over memories, they sounded too happy for people who had just received news that one of them is seriously ill.

"How are you, Alma?" Diane asked.

Alma stared at her in shock, trying to register if the question was really meant for her. "I'm doing quite well, Mother. I'm happy to you agreed to come to the hospital."

Diane nodded and looked away. For a split second, Alma thought she had seen a tear drop from Diane's eyes, but dismissed the thought as she went on immediately to talk to Rosemary.

Not long after they had sent the children off, the doctor returned from his office with Hope.

"Look who I found on my way back here," he said as he walked into Diane's room. "I tried to hint to her by complimenting on how heavy she had become," he laughed.

He looked around, hoping to get a response from at least one of them. It turned out, however, that none of them had gotten the joke. He looked around awkwardly for a few seconds and then looked towards the window near Eric.

"Can we go on with the news already?" Diane asked impatiently.

"In a minute, Mrs. Burnett," he said as he leaned against Eric. He picked up a brown envelope, different from the one he had in Diane's name. It was pink and had the diagram of a developing fetus on it.

Eric's mouth dropped wide open. From the envelope, he already understood what the news was. He had seen similar envelopes when Elaine had Morgan and Alice.

"You are six weeks pregnant, Mrs. Burnett. Congratulations!" He blurted out and handed over the envelope to her. Everyone stood, waiting for a reaction from her.

Hope stood with the envelope in her hand. Although she was overwhelmed by the news, her heart was filled with delight. Only that, she did not know how to show it. She was with child just a couple months after the wedding. A tear slipped from her eyes and after a few seconds, she broke into a smile. She no longer could hide her joyousness.

Eric and Rosemary laughed from behind her as Diane smiled. Eric

hugged her from behind while her mother stood in front of her, with her hands over her mouth. She could not believe that her dear Hope was becoming a mother. As much as she knew she loved Morgan and Alice, she was also aware that she had wanted children of their own. Now was her time.

Eric let go of her and Rosemary took his place immediately. "Congratulations, child," she said, "I'm very sure you'll make a great mother."

"Thank you, Mother. That is only possible because I learned from the best," she sobbed.

Alma felt the warmth that came from their embrace. She could not help herself from joining in. Rosemary lifted an arm and gave her room to hold Hope properly. "Congratulations, Hope. I am so happy for you and Eric," she said. "Please consider giving her a noble name like Alma," she winked and they burst into laughter. She let go of Hope and walked away.

There was tension in the room as Hope turned to the only person who hadn't come up to her.

Diane. She sat with her head bowed. It was almost like she was ashamed of herself and wanted to say something to Hope but couldn't.

"Congratulations, Eric," she said. "Congratulations to you too, Hope. I'm glad my next grandchild is coming from you."

Still overwhelmed by her emotions, Hope walked to where Diane sat and wrapped her arms around her. Diane could not help the tears that escapees her eyes, so she let them flow.

"Thank you, Diane," Hope replied.

The doctor cleared his throat and began, "Congratulations, Eric. Congratulations to you, Hope. I would have loved to determine the gender of your baby already, but since that is not my specialty, I recommend you meet with Angelica in the gynecology ward."

Hope nodded, "Yes, of course," she answered.

"Mother, you know you did not have to come home with us," Eric said. "The doctor said it would have been best for you to remain at the hospital until he sees your condition improve."

Diane sighed. She was already tired of arguing with Eric. "I can improve while I am here, Eric. You do not have to worry," she said.

"Of course I'm worried, mother. You are my mother and I worry about you all the time," he replied.

Diane's face fell, "Even though I have been such a terrible person to your wife?" She asked.

"Acknowledging that you have been a terrible person to Hope is a sign that you are not as bad as you have painted yourself to be," he expressed. "She is going to be at home more often from now on. So

you can take advantage of that to make things right between you two," he advised.

Diane nodded. That was exactly what she was going to do.

The following day, Eric was up early. He had done so to ensure that he is well prepared to go to work as well as discuss with Hope about the restaurant. He had to admit, the place was coming along great. He noticed she had kept the interior design which saved a lot on costs; although he knew that was not her intention. The pattern with the children's pictures matched her personality. Hope loved children and she didn't hesitate in showing it in something as small as her restaurant wall.

Eric thought it was only rational that they hurried on with the plans since, in a few months, Hope was not going to be able to walk around the way as she once could. Meanwhile, Rosemary was now fully involved in supervising the project. Hope suggested it, and Eric agreed to it.

It was no secret that he was afraid to leave things in her care for fear that she wasn't familiar with constructing a restaurant or decorating for that matter.

But Rosemary surprised him nonetheless by following in Hope's steps. They had the same taste. There was no doubt that they were indeed mother and daughter.

Eric took his bath that morning and had breakfast as well. Since he was in a hurry, he could not afford to wait for the rest of the family to come down, so he had breakfast with Hope alone. She woke up craving lasagna, and when it was brought to her, she threw up almost immediately after sniffing it.

In replacement, Charles was sent to get banana bread from the nearby bakery which she ate with all happiness.

"Have you thought about what you're going to name the restaurant?" Eric asked.

Although it seemed like Hope never had a difficult time making decisions, some things never came easy. They had been contemplating the name of the restaurant for weeks now but had come up with nothing.

"I'll think about it later, Eric," she uttered.

Eric sighed. "You said that the last three times I've asked you, my love. Do you mind if your mother picked that out for you?" He asked.

She shook her head, "I want to do it myself," she declared.

From Elaine, Eric had known better than to argue with a pregnant woman. He wondered if Hope was any different and would rebel like Elaine, but he decided not to test it.

"What do you plan on doing today?" Eric asked her, changing the topic immediately.

"I plan to work on the garden," she replied, rubbing the baby bump that had begun to show within the last week.

"Very well," he stated, "I'd better go on to work now so I can make it back in time for dinner."

He pulled his seat out from the table and went where she sat. He kissed the top of her head and said, "Goodbye, I'll be back later. I love you."

"I love you more, Eric," she said bending her face upwards so that he could kiss her nose too. "Have a lovely day, my love."

Hope spent the first hours of the day jotting down recipes after Eric left. To the best of her understanding, apart from the staff and Diane, she was alone in the mansion.

Diane was aware that Hope was staying in today and hoped to have the conversation with her. She only had to wait until she was prepared.

Hope walked out of the room she shared with Eric, went down to the storeroom, and came out holding a basket filled with gardening tools.

She made her way to the garden, picked a gardening stool, and began to work.

A few minutes into her weeding, Diane walked into the garden and took the seat behind her. She had been so quiet; Hope did not realize she had company.

"You know, I was once like you," she claimed.

Hope was startled, but she was careful enough to not poke herself with the gardening shears.

"Mrs. Diane," she said with her hand on her chest, "you scared me."

"I'm sorry," Diane apologized. "I didn't mean to startle you. Should I call for Joanne?" She asked.

Hope shook her head, "No, no. I don't," she said and turned to face Diane fully. She waited a while but Diane did not say anything, so she pressed on, "You were saying something before the interruption?"

"Yes, yes," Diane said and cleared her throat. "As I was saying, I was once like you. From a small family that had nothing. I grew up just as you did. Watching my parents serve under noble men and women," she said and sighed.

"It was amazing. I loved how simple we were and how close we were. We loved one another so much we rarely had time to realize the things we were missing out on," she smiled at the memory. "Along the line, during a big trade fair, I met the nobleman, Mr. Henry Burnett Esq. My parents insisted that year that I get a stand at the fair to showcase what I could do with my hands. I was an excellent seamstress. Mostly with the pieces of fabric the lady my mother served

had thrown away. It earned me a reasonable sum of money. But since I had to pay for the stand, I didn't get much out of it."

"Henry followed me up after that day and promised to help me start up a small store. I was to train in dressmaking. He enrolled me in classes. A few years later, against his family's wishes, he married me and that was when we moved to Ohio. I know how it feels to start from scratch with almost nothing since his father seized almost all his property. We did not even have cars then. We came here in a carriage. It wasn't an easy move, but it was worth it."

Hope tilted her head trying to figure out why she was divulging such personal information to her.

"We built most of this, you know. Henry and I. The life Alma and Eric can live is primarily because of our hard work and effort," she paused, trying to be cautious of the next words to use. "That's why I sought for the best and nothing but the best for my children. They may not see it that way and may only look at it as me trying to control them, but that's not the case."

Hope put her hand over Diane's, "I understand. I would have done the same for my children."

"Any mother would. So there it is, Hope. I just want to say I'm sorry for how I treated you and your mother. I hope you find it in your heart to forgive me. I have watched you for some time now and it has dawned on me that Eric couldn't have made a better choice."

Hope rose to her feet pulling Diane up with her. "I hold no grudges against you, Diane," she commented.

"Oh, child," Diane said and patted her head. "Can you make me something to eat when you're done out here? Your chicken soup perhaps."

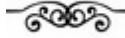
"Very well," Hope replied. "I'll be more than happy to."

Eric stood by the door watching. He was proud of his mother. Her efforts in making things right with Hope showed her approval of their union.

The air around the dining room was very different. Since there was no form of hatred hovering about, it was easy for everyone to communicate freely.

Everyone went to bed with their hearts filled with joy. They were all having a blissful night. Well, that was until Maria let out a shrill cry. "Someone come quickly! Something has happened to Mrs. Burnett," she yelled.

Chapter Five



The chapel was filled with many people. Many of whom, Hope did not know. Diane had passed away that night after an unexpected stroke. Although they were very sad, they were happy because Diane was able to make peace with everyone before she died. It was why Eric was most grateful that she was given time to amend her ways.

"You know, Diane, she repeatedly came here to make complaints about her children to me. Especially her son, Eric," the priest stated and the congregation laughed lightly.

"Whenever she came with these complaints, I'd tell her to exercise patience. And we all know how that usually went with Diane," the congregation laughed again. "But we are here to celebrate a woman who was bold enough to accept her wrongdoings and make peace with everyone she had wronged in one way or the other. Including me, by telling me not to officiate the union between Eric and Hope." This sent the congregation into a wild uproar. People giggled with excitement all around. "Diane is one to be celebrated." He said.

"I know many of you have heard the story of how she came down here with Mr. Henry Burnett to start a new life. That was not an easy move. Today we celebrate one who endeavored to make a better life for her family. One who believed in love and above all, one who was loved."

Loud applause echoed throughout the chapel.

Many other formalities had been carried out when Hope noticed Eric was nowhere to be found.

"Have you seen Eric?" She asked Alma. She had not meant to disturb her moment with Tony but it was almost time for the tributes to be read; Eric had to be present.

"Maybe he drove back to the mansion? I think I saw him drive that way a few minutes ago," Tony said.

"Thank you, Tony" Hope said. She hugged Alma and walked away.

She walked out of the chapel onto the gravel-filled grounds looking for Charles. With her three-piece skirt lifted to her knees, she searched the grounds rapidly for Charles.

Sitting by the side of the vicarage, she found him. He sat with his head bent low. When he heard her footsteps, he lifted his head and stood up when he realized she might have been looking for him.

"I don't like funerals, Mrs. Hope," he said.

"That makes us both," Hope replied. "I need to go home. I think

Eric went there but he needs to be here before they begin reading the tributes," she told him.

"Wait here, I'll bring the car this way." He said and left to retrieve the car.

Just as Hope suspected, Eric was in Diane's room. He laid on the bed without his shoes.

"Eric," she said softly as she entered the room.

He was awake, she could tell, but he didn't move when she called him.

Hope took off her shoes and laid down beside him, embracing the silence between the two of them.

After what seemed like forever, he finally spoke. "How far has the procession gone?"

Hope sighed. "Far enough for you to return," she replied. "In a few minutes, they would begin with the reading of the tributes.

He sighed. Sometimes, they laid like this in silence and it was comforting. This one was not. It was deafening. Hope thought hard about what to say next. She struggled to find words that would bring him the comfort he longed for.

"You know, your mother would not be pleased to see you sulking in her bed," Hope alleged.

Eric scoffed. He wanted to give her the talk about what would or wouldn't please his own mother, but he decided against it. It would have been very insensitive of him.

"I'm aware. I just want to be here," he said in a tone much sharper than he intended.

"Then what are you doing in here?" She asked calmly. She understood he was grieving and did not react to how he raised his voice earlier.

"Remembering her," he said. It did not make sense to him since that is exactly what they were doing at the chapel. Remembering Diane. "Can you give me a few minutes please? I'll come down momentarily, I promise."

Hope stood outside the mansion, by the car waiting for him. True to his words, Eric was out in less than ten minutes.

"Let's go," he asserted.

He opened the passenger's side for Hope before he turned around and entered the driver's seat.

They arrived at the chapel just in time for him to give his tribute.

He stood before the congregation behind the lectern.

"Before I read my tribute, I want to thank my wife, Mrs. Hope Burnett who came home to get me," he said and cleared his throat. "I never imagined myself standing here to read something like this so

soon."

The congregation fell silent. All others had given their tributes and it was time for his. They sat silently as though this was the moment they had all been waiting for.

Eric looked at the paper he held in his hands and watched as tears filled the lines. He wanted to start reading from it, but then he shook his head and scrambled it into a ball then placed it inside his left pocket.

"Many would attribute my wealth and success to my parents, and that is absolutely true. Because of how wealthy they were, I was able to attend the best schools to receive the best training. My mother taught me several things growing up. One thing she taught me was to never give up. She instilled in me that hard work pays off. She always believed in me and wanted the absolute best for me, I'll never forget that" he noted.

"She is the reason I fell in love with my wife. My Hope. They are alike in so many ways even though she could never bring herself to admit it. Diane was a god-fearing mother, a disciplinarian, a fighter who would not stop until she gets what she wants."

"Today we celebrate one who was not just a mother, but a friend and a companion. Rest in the bosom of the Lord, my dear Mother. Till we meet to part no more."

A lot of plans had been put in place after Diane's passing. But one major project that had been put on hold was Hope's restaurant.

"Can anyone say a brief prayer for us?" Eric asked.

It was time for dinner and ever since Diane's passing, Eric had requested that everyone be present at dinner. They should not be too careless with the time they had left because they had no idea how much time they had left.

"Our Heavenly Father, I thank you for this meal. I ask that you bless it in Jesus' name. Amen," Morgan muttered.

"Amen," everyone chorused.

"I would love to have a brief discussion with everyone after dinner. So please do not be in a hurry to leave after the meal," Hope said.

All replied in the affirmative.

"You know, Grandma Diane used to say that it is bad to talk at the table. Isn't that right, Papa?" Morgan preached.

"Yes indeed, Morgan. You're right," Eric said.

"But I wish she was here to have a taste of Hope's delicious soup," he sighed. "She would have loved it."

"I know, Morgan. I know." Eric admitted.

Hope thought for a while and then spoke, "Diane loved chicken soup, right?" She asked, looking around from face to face.

Everyone was either nodding affirmatively or saying yes.

"Why don't we open the restaurant in her memory? We could dedicate it to her. I'm sure she would have loved that, right?" she said.

Eric nodded. He was trying to figure out how he had landed himself someone as good and kind-hearted as Hope. It was amazing how she could forget everything that Diane had done to her and just love her like they had been the best of friends.

"What do you say we open the restaurant in her name?" Hope asked. "Or maybe, in remembrance of her and my father," she offered.

"Now that is a splendid idea," Eric commended. "How do you do these things?" He asked.

"Honestly, I don't know. I just know everyone deserves happiness and I know how to bring that to the table."

Eric smiled and took her hand, "I don't deserve you," he said looking at her.

"No," she said. "Don't say that, Eric. You deserve me and even better. I am the one who does not deserve you," she continued. "Who takes a total stranger into his home and caters for her mother's health?"

"Not many," Joanne replied.

"Or maybe, that's just Eric," Rosemary jumped in.

"Yes, I agree." Alma chipped in. "That's just Eric."

"Then there's the lady who walked right into this very house, loved my children like they were her own and even taught me to love them the way they needed to be loved," Eric said trying to shift the attention from himself to Hope.

"No, No, No. There's no way you're doing that. This night, I planned to celebrate you and that is all we are going to do," Hope ordered.

"Who said there is not enough room for more than one celebrant?" Eric asked.

"No one!" Everyone replied.

"But that will be if I don't-"

Eric cut her short as he clinked his wine glass. When everyone was silent, he began, "I want us to make a-"

"...to make a brief toast to my husband, Eric," Hope said, cutting him off.

"Yes, and to my wife, Hope. Cheers!"

Epilogue



"So family and friends, we are gathered here to witness a very memorable event. It is in honor of Diane Burnett of blessed memory that we are here today as well as in memory of Mr. Edward Duncan," Eric said through the public address system.

"I present to you all, Burnett-Duncan Diner." Alma continued.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen, I don't know if your taste buds are as eager as mine, but I'd love to taste every single menu item inside that place," Rosemary added.

"Because we love you, Diane and Edward we hope to see you on the other side, I want to make this toast to the memories we'll always have, although I really wish you both were here," Hope said. "To Diane! To Edward!" She shouted and cut the ribbon that was blocking the doorpost.

Two years after the opening...

Burnett-Duncan Diner was a success and became the most popular restaurant in all of Ohio. It was not your regular diner though. It was a huge upgrade from the regular.

Eric walked through the crowd searching for Hope. "Celine said you wanted to see me," he said as he came up to her and wrapped his arms around her waist.

"Yes, I just got news that I am a few weeks pregnant with another child," she exclaimed.

Eric looked elated. Hope feared his reaction since he had mentioned some time before their wedding that he wanted only three children.

"I think I know what is on your mind right now," he said.

Could he?

"But that doesn't matter anymore. I will have a thousand and one children with you if you want," he said. "I love you, Hope Burnett, the children's nanny."

"I love you more, Eric Burnett, the grumpy man."

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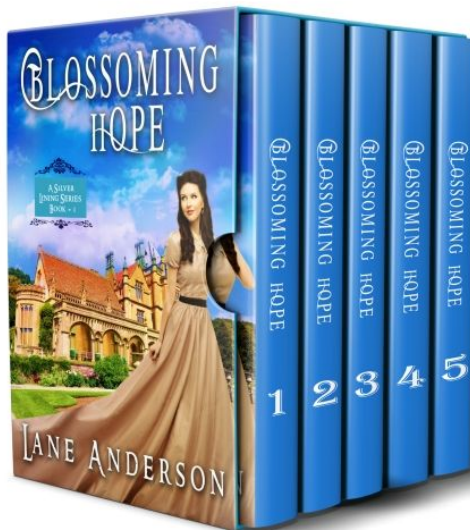


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